

Little White Lies by YumeArashi

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Summary:

Steve finds out Jonathan lied for him, and wants to know why.

Little White Lies

Steve had taken pains to avoid Nancy and Jonathan once everything was over, which may have explained why Nancy had chosen to ambush him as he left chemistry class for lunch.

“Steve, can we talk?”

Honestly, Steve would have preferred not to - their last talk hadn’t ended too well. But it wasn’t like he couldn’t say that. “Sure, Nance.”

His lack of enthusiasm must have shown on his face despite his best effort, because Nancy grimaced. “Five minutes, okay? There are some things that just...need to be said.”

She wasn’t wrong there. “Okay, but behind the bleachers, not between the gym and the science wing again, okay? Nothing good ever happens when we talk there.”

“Fair,” Nancy’s lips quirked in a wry smile. She was quiet as they walked out over the winter-killed grass, the scent of coming snow on the air. Steve found a relatively sheltered spot and turned to her, ready to listen.

“For starters, I’m sorry for what I said that night, even if I was drunk and don’t remember it. I never wanted to hurt you, and even if I wasn’t myself, it wasn’t smart to get myself into that state in the first place.”

“It...” Steve couldn’t quite bring himself to say ‘it’s okay’. “It was the truth. Something to be said for honesty, even brutal honesty. And you were hurting. I mean, yeah, the takeaway I got was that our relationship was bullshit, that kinda news gets a guy’s attention, you know?” He could still feel the pain of it, worse than the most vicious punch his old man had ever landed. “But I did a lot of thinking since then, got my head out of my ass, realized it wasn’t just about me. I never understood how much you were hurting, because I never had anyone like Barb. I knew she was your best friend but to me that always meant like Tommy H., I didn’t get it. Still can’t, not really, but at least I understand now you couldn’t let things lie. I know

that's too little, too late - never was the brightest bulb in the box - but for what it's worth, I get it. I should have supported you. I'm glad Jonathan did. I'm glad you didn't have to fight all on your own to put things right. I'm glad you have him. I..." He swallowed hard. "I hope you're happy."

Nancy half-lifted her hand as if she wanted to reach out to him, then dropped it back at her side, as if remembering she no longer had that right. "I did some thinking too," she offered. "I don't blame you.

You were worried about me. I was so angry, I'd forgotten that Hawkins Lab would, and had, killed innocent people to keep this quiet. You weren't wrong to want to toe that line. You weren't right, maybe, but you weren't wrong either. Even if I couldn't understand or agree with that, I never should have taken my anger out on you.

You were doing what you thought was best, because you cared about me and wanted me safe."

Steve nodded, not trusting himself to answer. If he let himself speak, he'd be telling her how he always cared and wanted her safe, how he always would. Like her stifled impulse to touch, he didn't have that right anymore.

"I wanted to thank you, too. For keeping Mike safe in those tunnels - which doesn't entirely make up for letting him go down there in the first place, but since you were kidnapped by a bunch of children, I suppose I can forgive that," she smiled mischievously.

Steve groaned. "I am never living that down, am I?"

"Nope. But look on the bright side, no one else knows about it."

Steve grimaced, imagining Billy or Tommy finding out. "I'll take it."

"Also, thank you for asking Jonathan to get me home safe from the party. I can't imagine that was an easy thing to do. It means a lot to me that you put my safety above your pain." She wrinkled her nose.

"Though, why were you mad about it the next day if you asked him to do it?"

"Didn't mean I had to like it," Steve stalled for time, trying to figure out what she was talking about. "How'd you find out I asked him?"

“He told me. After our fight, I went out at lunch to ask him about the party.”

The pieces fell into place. “I guess that’d do it. Hey, if you see him, can you tell him I want to talk to him? I never thanked him for doing that.”

Nancy nodded, and gave him a sad smile. “You’re a good guy, Steve,” she said softly.

Steve shrugged. “Jonathan’s a better one,” he told her, and headed inside before she could reply.

Nancy must have passed along the word, because Jonathan was lingering in the parking lot when Steve came out at the end of the day, sitting on the hood of his car. “Hey, Byers. Jonathan,” Steve corrected himself, taking a seat beside him. “Thanks for sticking around.”

“Nancy said you wanted to talk.” Jonathan’s expression was curious and a little wary, though nowhere near as much so as it would have been a year ago if he’d heard Steve Harrington wanted a word with him.

“Yeah. She said something interesting at lunch. Said I asked you to get her home safe from the party. Which is funny, since I pretty distinctly remember not doing that.”

Jonathan gave him a sidelong look. “Why do you care? You came off looking pretty good.”

“Just wanna know why. Most guys would take any chance to bad-mouth their crush’s boyfriend.”

“I’m not an asshole, Steve.” Jonathan looked irritated.

Steve held up his hands in a gesture of surrender. “Not saying you are. Just saying I wouldn’t exactly have needed any help to look bad.

You could have told her the plain truth instead.”

Jonathan fidgeted with the strap of his shoulder bag. “She wasn’t real coherent that night, but I could tell you were going through a rough patch. You two were crazy about each other. You were the one she’d chosen. Seeing that fall apart over some drunken bickering she didn’t even remember the next day...” He shook his head. “I figured you’d make up and it’d all be good.” He looked up, meeting Steve’s eyes as he so rarely did for anyone. “I never meant to steal her from you, Steve. I wouldn’t do that.”

“I know, man,” Steve gave Jonathan’s shoulder a light cuff, barely a glancing brush of contact. “She made her choice, and she chose the better man. Like that stupid poem, if you love something set it free, if it doesn’t come back then it wasn’t meant to be, or whatever. She was never mine.”

“She’s not mine either, if it’s any consolation,” Jonathan offered awkwardly. “She’ll never be anyone’s but her own.”

“Yeah,” Steve smiled painfully. After a moment he added, “I would have gone back, you know. I never meant to leave her there, not like that, she was in a bad way. I just...” he closed his eyes. “Some of the stuff she said really hit home, you know? And she was drunk, she was hurt and angry, I couldn’t be mad at her. I just needed a minute, needed to get out, I couldn’t breathe in there. I would have gone back. Even if it didn’t do me any favors, I still would have made sure she got home safe.”

“I know. Never doubted it - whatever other faults you may have, you’re not that kinda guy,” Jonathan told him.

“Thanks,” Steve snorted.

“I just went in to check if she was okay. I figured you’d be back but she wanted to go home, and she wasn’t looking too good. Figured you’d understand that getting her home safe was the priority.”

“Yeah. Thanks for that. Much as it hurt when I went back in to look for her and heard what happened, at least I knew you’d take good care of her.” Steve gave him a crooked little grin. “If there’s one

thing I can get, it's being crazy about Nancy Wheeler." He looked upward, watching a bird wing through the steel-grey sky. "I'm glad it's you. If it can't be me, I'm glad it's you."

Jonathan reached over and squeezed his shoulder, comfort and solidarity and a promise all in one.

They sat in silence and watched the snow begin to fall.

Author's Note:

You could read this as gen, but personally I consider this pre-OT3